

# GUEST POST BY SHAUNA GERAGHTY—A QUEST FOR PRIVACY: A BUDDING MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL'S STORY

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Working in the mental health care industry, I feel that it is important that I strike a balance between providing enough information to connect with friends, family and colleagues and still maintain a professional image on social media. I don't consider myself a private person, but I do feel that it is important to maintain a low profile on the internet.

I work with a variety of clients in a variety of settings: individuals with severe mental illness, traumatic brain injury, PTSD, veterans who just returned from Iraq or Afghanistan, children, adults and elderly. Regardless of their age, gender or diagnosis, they all have one thing in common: each one can find out very personal information about me online.

I have no control over whether or not they look up my information online, what they do with that information or how they will view me as a professional after they find information. However, I can control what information they can access.

When I started my doctoral program, the first talk that my colleagues and I were given was to "clean up" our online presence. Our professors suggested we first check Google, whitepages.com, pipl.com, etc. to see what information is available about us online. Then, do our best to remove anything that isn't professional.

I followed their advice and was surprised at the results. Not very far into my search, I found a website that posted all of my previous addresses, my current address, a speeding ticket I received when I was 19 years old and a not-so professional description of why I was chosen as my best friend's bridesmaid. I immediately thought, "This isn't good. How can I get these down?"

So, my quest to scrub my online presence clean began. I asked my best friend to password protect her wedding landing page, called the court that issued my speeding ticket and asked them to remove my information from their website (no success) and looked into how I could get my addresses off the internet. After a bit of an effort, I couldn't come up with a way to get my address or my ticket down. The best I could do was hope that my clients wouldn't dig that deep.

As a mental health professional, the image that I portray is crucial in order for my clients to make progress. It affects how I establish rapport, my credibility, the therapeutic alliance and my client's treatment engagement. No matter how hard I work to perfect my professional appearance, all that work can be undone with a curious mind, a click of a mouse and a publicly posted speeding ticket.

I feel that it is therefore imperative that all mental health professionals use a service like Safe Shepherd to protect their online presence, remove any less than professional information and to provide peace of mind that your information won't get into the hands of your clients. Not only do our careers depend on it, but our client's progress in therapy does as well.

About the author:

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